



## Site Navigation

- Cleanups, Remediation
- Emergency Response
- Licensing
- Permits, Registrations
- Preventing Pollution
- Recycling
- Reporting
- Rules

- Data
- Forms
- Maps
- Public Notices
- Publications
- Records
- Webcasts

- About Us
- Contact Us

How 's our Customer Service? Please fill out our [Customer Satisfaction Survey](#)

You are here: [Home](#) → [Publications](#) → [Periodicals](#) → [Natural Outlook](#) → [Winter 2003](#) → Cars and Trucks Ride Out New Inspections

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## Cars and Trucks Ride Out New Inspections

Nine months into more rigorous inspections, nine out of 10 vehicles are passing. The mandatory emissions test expands to more counties this spring.

### Tougher emissions tests were introduced in 2002

Nine months into a more rigorous emissions inspections program, some 2.6 million vehicles had been tested in the Houston and Dallas-Fort Worth areas. Of those, about nine out of 10 passed.

Most of the estimated 285,000 cars and trucks failing the initial tests were required to make the needed repairs and be retested.

The goal of the program, called AirCheckTexas, is to reduce tailpipe emissions that contribute to the formation of ozone. Testing in the most populated counties of the state's two largest urban areas started in May 2002.

About 2,000 inspection stations offer the new tests to determine whether emissions-related components are functioning properly.

Emissions testing is currently part of annual safety inspections for vehicles registered in Harris County and the counties of Dallas, Tarrant, Denton, and Collin.

"We've not yet completed the first year, but so far we're quite pleased with the program," said Hazel Barbour, manager of the TCEQ's Mobile Source programs. "The failure rate is close to what was predicted--we expected an overall rate of about 12 percent.

"We're also encouraged by the number of participating inspection stations, which is more than we'd hoped for," she added. "Buying the inspection equipment required an additional investment on the part of owners, but we are pleased that so many saw it as a good business decision, a means of better serving their customers."

Barbour noted there were initial equipment problems, as often happens with new technical programs, but most were worked out in the early weeks.

AirCheckTexas, which is run jointly by the TCEQ and the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), applies to gasoline vehicles that are 2 to 24 years old.

Cars and trucks that are model year 1996 or newer undergo an on-board diagnostics test, in which a scan tool plugs into the vehicle's computer and downloads stored information to identify emission systems or components that are not working properly.

The test monitors for a malfunction or deterioration of components that control exhaust emissions.

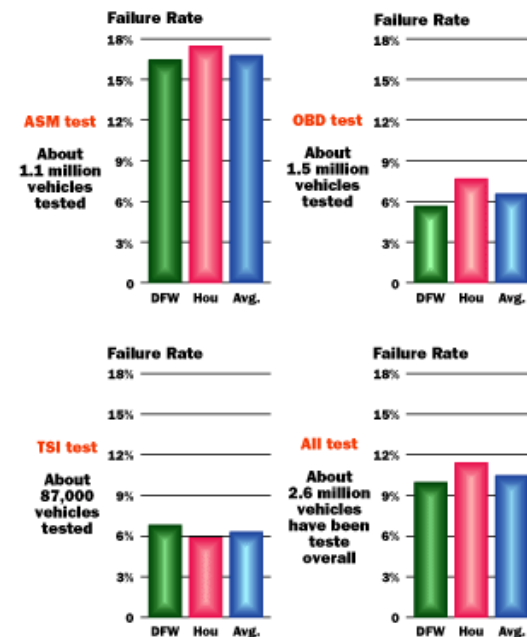
Vehicles that are model year 1995 or older are put through a test called the accelerated simulation mode, which duplicates driving conditions. Once a vehicle is placed on an apparatus called a dynamometer, the engine is accelerated to 25 mph, and instruments measure what comes out of the tailpipe--in particular the levels of hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen oxide.

A third method, the two-speed idle test, is reserved for vehicles that are too large (8,500-plus pounds) for the

### AirCheckTexas May-December 2002

Of the 2.6 million cars and trucks tested, 10.7 percent failed the initial emissions test in Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston. The failure rate is highest for vehicles put through the accelerated simulation mode (ASM), which is designed for model year 1995 or older; newer cars are tested with on-board diagnostics (OBD). Vehicles that cannot be accommodated by ASM or OBD go through the two-speed idle test (TSI).

Vehicles must pass the test—or retest—to receive the annual safety sticker and to be properly registered.



Note: Results do not include El Paso, where two-speed idle testing has been in place for several years.

dynamometer or those with only four-wheel drive.

Cars and trucks that fail must be repaired and retested.

Waivers are available, as well as an assistance program for motorists who cannot afford to repair or replace their vehicle.

Waivers or extensions may apply in these circumstances:

- The vehicle was driven less than 5,000 miles since the last safety test and at least \$100 in emissions-related repairs have been performed.
- The parts needed to repair the vehicle are not readily available.
- The vehicle is unable to pass the emissions test and does not qualify for any other waiver. DPS determines that granting the waiver will not have a significant impact on air quality.
- The vehicle owner is low-income and qualifies for public assistance. This extension is valid for one test cycle but may be granted more than once during the life of the vehicle.



For low-income Texans, the state has established the AirCheck Texas Repair & Replacement Assistance Program, which offers financial assistance in making emissions-related repairs or replacing a vehicle that is being retired.

AirCheckTexas expands in May 2003 to nine additional counties: Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker, and Rockwall in North Texas; and Brazoria, Fort Bend, Galveston, and Montgomery in the Houston area.

In 2004, Chambers, Liberty, and Waller counties near Houston also join the program unless they demonstrate to the TCEQ that they will implement an alternate plan with equivalent emissions reductions.

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